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English Language Teaching in Lebanese Schools: Trends and Challenges

Fatima Esseili

Issues that Motivated the Research

Like many other countries around the world, the foreign language teaching profession in Lebanon has been flourishing, with English being the forerunner. The new curriculum established by the Lebanese government in the 1990s mandates that in addition to their native language, Arabic, Lebanese children must learn two foreign languages at school, the first language in grade one, and the second in grade seven. Some private schools, however, begin teaching the second foreign language as early as grade four or five, and parents of young learners have to choose one of the foreign languages as a medium of instruction for their children. This policy has led to an increase in schools that teach both English and French as foreign languages, and to an increase in the number of students enrolled in schools that use English as a medium of instruction.

With this demand on the teaching and learning of foreign languages, a number of issues have arisen. Using a foreign language as a medium of instruction entails a certain level of proficiency on the part of the teacher as well as the learner. If such a proficiency level has not been reached, then how can we expect learners to be successful in the different school subjects taught in the foreign language, and how can we fairly assess them? The issue of proficiency level leads to another related area of concern, which is teachers' qualifications or professional preparation to teach a foreign language and to use it as a medium of instruction. This study explores the issues highlighted above, along with the ensuing challenges that some public and private school teachers face in their classrooms.

Context of the Research

Lebanon's trilingual policy is the result of decades of exposure to foreign languages that were introduced long before the creation of modern Lebanon with its current borders. Exposure to foreign languages started with the advent of western missionaries in the seventeenth century that established French, British, and American schools. Learners became either "English educated" or "French educated," labels that are still used today. With the end of World War I, Lebanon became a French mandate, and French "became a compulsory subject" in all schools (Kaufman, 2004, p. 11), and became the medium of instruction for sciences, mathematics, and social studies at all levels of education (Constantine, 1995; Ghaith & Shaaban, 1999). Teachers in public schools, however, were not prepared to teach the new foreign language, let alone teach most of the subjects in French. Because of either the teachers' limited proficiency or lack of proficiency in French, the government closed 111 public elementary schools and discharged 400 public school teachers in 1930 (Kobeissy, 1999). It is worth noting that the limited proficiency problem that existed in 1930 is not very much different from the current situation in many schools. Nowadays, it is enough to hold a bachelor's degree from a university to become a foreign language teacher (Orr, 2011). In some cases, especially in private schools, a degree is not even a

requirement. Also, it is not uncommon to hear of teachers in public schools teaching subject areas that have nothing to do with their own professional background; for example, a mathematics teacher teaching a language course.

In 1943, Lebanon became an independent republic, but the Lebanese government left the education system “almost completely in the local and foreign hands” (Bashshur, 1966, p. 457). Private schools outnumbered public schools, and the negative attitude toward public schools persisted, along with the government’s uneven distribution of education funds to the schools in different Lebanese cities and villages (Kobeissy, 1999).

Today, schools in Lebanon are divided into public and private schools. Private schools are subdivided into subsidized, unsubsidized, and United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools, which were established specifically for Palestinian refugees. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the percentage of public schools (49%) and private schools (51%) in Lebanon was roughly equal. Ten years later, however, public schools had decreased to 47% while private schools had increased by 2% (CERD, 2011). In addition, the number of students enrolled in public schools has also been steadily declining since 2001, whereas the number of students in private schools has been growing. To illustrate, the CERD states that in the academic year 1999 – 2000, students in public schools constituted 37% of the population. In the academic year 2008 – 2009, students attending public schools had decreased to only 31.8% (CERD, 2011).

This decline in enrollment in public schools is partially the result of the lack of faith in the public school system and its ability to provide learners with good quality education. Education in private schools has been generally perceived by the Lebanese as being more prestigious and of better quality, especially in regard to teaching sciences and foreign languages as well as the use of the latest textbooks and teaching methods. The 2010 report released by the Lebanese National Education Strategy indicated that the decline in enrollment rates in public schools is explained by “the widening of the achievement gap between public and private schools” (p. 3). Historically, despite all attempts by the Lebanese government to spend money on public education since the country’s independence, the percentage of students enrolled in public schools has never exceeded or surpassed that of students enrolled in private schools (Kobeissy, 1999).

As for the language of instruction in schools, the CERD’s statistics reveal that in the mid-to-late nineties, about 62% of schools used French as a medium of instruction, 38% used English. Only 14% of the total schools were teaching both French and English as language courses. In the academic year 2008 – 2009, French as a medium of instruction decreased to 44%, while English as a medium of instruction increased to 56%, and schools that teach both languages increased to 22% (CERD, 2011). On the other hand, the percentage of students who study English as a first foreign language increased from 30.5% in the 1996 – 1997 academic year to 58.7% in the 2009 – 2010 academic year. On the surface, it might seem like the demand for learning English as a first foreign language has been negatively affecting the demand for learning French as a first foreign language, which decreased from 69.5% in 1996 – 1997 to 41.3% in 2009 – 2010. However, this demand for learning English should not be examined without taking into consideration other factors, such as the change in demographics related to schools and students. Examining statistics from the academic years 2006 – 2007 and 2007 – 2008, for example, reveals that the number of

schools decreased from 2,556 to 1,812, which means that 744 schools were lost in one year (CERD, 2011). These schools were mostly public schools that had used French as a medium of instruction.

As far as the native language is concerned, the Ministry of Education states that learning Arabic should have the same weight as learning a foreign language. The extent to which this requirement is applied in private schools is yet to be investigated, but the current curriculum that is followed in public schools dedicates an equal number of weekly classroom hours to the native language and the first foreign language: seven hours in grades one through three, six hours in grades four through six, and six hours in grades seven through nine, in addition to two hours for the second foreign language (CERD, 2011). Such an allocation is in line with the two objectives of the curricular reform: to create an individual dedicated “to the Arabic language as an official national language and able to use it efficiently and effectively in all domains... [and] who is proficient in at least one foreign language for the activation of openness to international cultures to enrich and be enriched by them” (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1996, p. 103). Despite the outlined objectives with regard to Arabic, foreign languages are generally perceived by many Lebanese as being more important than the native language because of their usefulness in terms of career opportunities and future education plans (Diab, 2000; Shaaban & Ghaith, 2002; Bahous et al., 2011).

Research Questions Addressed

This study aimed at exploring the working conditions and challenges that are faced by some public and private school teachers in Lebanon when teaching foreign languages. The following research questions were explored:

1. What is the current working condition of teachers?
2. What are the challenges that teachers face in their school contexts?
3. What kind of professional preparation have the teachers received?

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

For this exploratory study, twenty teachers were interviewed in seventeen schools in different areas within Lebanon. There were eight public schools and nine private schools represented in this study. Five schools were located in Beirut, three in Mount Lebanon, three in Southern Lebanon, and six in Northern Lebanon. Data were collected during the fall of 2011. Interviews were carried out through different means including face-to-face, telephone, e-mail, Skype, and Microsoft Network (MSN). The researcher started with a set of predetermined questions (demographic information, professional preparation, job conditions, salary, funding, textbooks used, language use, and challenges), and asked follow-up questions as needed.

The face-to-face and telephone interviews were all conducted in Arabic. As the phone interviews were taking place, the researcher was simultaneously typing the responses in English. The other interviews were mostly in English with some Arabic used every now and then. The researcher looked for commonalities among the responses obtained from interviews, and these were grouped into different themes according to the main research questions.

Findings and Discussion

Two of the teachers interviewed were working on their Master's degrees in education and in English language teaching. One of the participants had a teaching diploma; thirteen had obtained their Bachelor's degrees; and four were working with high school certificates (Lebanese Baccalaureate), but were working on their Bachelor's degrees in a specific subject area. Four of the teachers were trilingual (Arabic, English, and French), and sixteen were bilingual (Arabic and English). All except three of the instructors interviewed were full-time teachers. The other three worked part-time in private and public schools.

Working conditions

All teachers believed that they are underpaid. On average, full-time teachers in private schools who have not yet finished their Bachelor's degrees and who teach elementary school levels make about \$340 a month. Teachers with a Bachelor's degree who teach high school students earn about \$570 a month. In contrast, non-tenured elementary public school teachers get paid about \$10 per hour, while high school teachers get slightly less than \$20 per hour. Neither group gets paid until the end of the school year, a situation which is usually very frustrating to many of the teachers, considering the current economic conditions in Lebanon. Other public school teachers, who are tenured, earn an average monthly salary of \$700. Full-time teachers must work for 35 to 40 hours per week on the school premises; however, some public school teachers, as one instructor indicated, do not actually work the number of hours recorded on their time cards because there is an excess of teachers in certain schools. As far as the number of students is concerned, it ranges from 30 students per class in most private schools to 35 and 40 students in public schools. This is not always the case in all schools. "Some schools in the South," one teacher said, "have twenty students per class or even less, but that's because there are no students to begin with or because students commute to schools that are perceived as better."

All of the private school teachers stated that they do not feel secure about their ability to maintain their jobs, primarily because there is no tenure system at their schools. This is one reason why these teachers feel they cannot complain about their working conditions. The private school teachers know that the school can replace them at any time because there are many degree holders out there who are unemployed and "wouldn't mind the number of hours and job conditions," as one teacher stated. Public school teachers, on the other hand, are employed by the government and are able to obtain tenure. One teacher explained that once they do, nobody could lay them off no matter how ineffective the teacher is.

All private school teachers have coordinators who help the teachers work on their lesson plans, and in some cases, they create the lesson plans. Furthermore, the coordinators regularly visit their classrooms to make sure that effective teaching is taking place. The concept of a coordinator, however, does not exist in the literal sense of the word in public schools. One teacher described coordination in her school as "Tansi' talzi" meaning, "collage." She stated that the math, English, and Arabic coordinators do not even have Bachelor degrees. Only one teacher who worked in two schools reported that there is real coordination when it comes to the English program in her public school. She stated that in her public school, the coordinator

observes the teacher, writes a report to the principal, and accompanies the report with student exams “as evidence of the teacher’s effectiveness.” Such reports, she stated, could result in transferring a teacher from teaching a higher grade level to a lower one, and vice versa.

As far as government supervision is concerned, public school teachers concurred that it is only a kind of formality. “The government inspector,” one teacher explained, “is not specialized in a core area, and is supposed to come every month. When he rarely visits a class, he attends for ten minutes and primarily examines the interaction between the students and teacher. But most of the time, he drinks tea at the principal’s office.” Another teacher mentioned that sometimes inspectors receive “gifts” from teachers, and in some cases, they develop friendships with the latter and end up visiting classes as a kind of formality.

Three of the private schools included in this study require their teachers to participate in teacher development workshops every year, and they fully or partially fund their teachers to attend such workshops. One of these schools requires its teachers to attend intensive teaching orientation before the school year begins. The remaining schools did not encourage their teachers to attend such workshops and if teachers wanted to attend, they would have to pay for the workshops out of their own pockets. Similarly, in public schools, participating in teacher preparation workshops is optional and is often done according to the teacher’s convenience.

Major challenges

In addition to the working conditions of teachers, public and private school teachers face other challenges. Both groups have to deal with inadequate textbook choice and lack of materials and resources. Lack of teacher preparation is another area that the majority of teachers referred to as a problem. All teachers interviewed in this study talked about parents as being a source of challenge. Moreover, preparation for official exit examinations and students’ inability to communicate using the foreign language were additional challenges identified by the teachers. These points will be addressed below.

Textbooks and materials. The textbooks used in public and private schools to teach foreign languages are very different. The former uses government issued textbooks, whereas the latter relies on textbooks imported from the United States.

When it comes to teaching English, public school teachers use *Themes*, a locally published textbook series that is part of the curricular reforms the Lebanese government started in the 1990s. These textbooks are described by one teacher as being a “total failure,” and by another teacher as “worthless.” One teacher claimed that these textbooks “are not integrated, they lack components related to grammar and writing, and they do not even have any kind of preparation related to the official examinations.” Five teachers thought that the textbooks do not have adequate assessment procedures to test whether students grasped the content. These five teachers believed that the pronunciation activities are not very helpful to students, and not sufficient to create a solid foundation in the English language. In addition, three teachers stated that the government textbooks contain many mistakes. Such mistakes, the teachers stated, are not restricted to foreign language textbooks, but pertain to Arabic and mathematics as well. The new curriculum, as one teacher observed, “places little emphasis on grammar and more on writing”

and it expects the students to learn grammar deductively from writing. Teachers complained that having less emphasis on grammar would make students' writing weaker because "they lack structure." This lack of textbook resources forces the underpaid teachers to "work extra" and search for supplementary materials from external sources in order to offset the gaps in these textbooks. Even if teachers in public schools wanted to use materials from external resources, they are usually restricted by what they can bring to class and what they can do. One teacher explained that her school does not have visual aids. There are no LCD screens, computer labs, or sound systems. So if a teacher wishes to show a video, she would have to bring her own laptop, LCD projector, etc. "We have an outdated black and white TV that is hidden in some room and that takes forever to turn it on. Nobody uses it," the teacher said. None of the schools, private or public, had language labs at the time when the interviews were conducted. One private school in the south installed interactive white boards (IWB) in its classrooms, but the teacher reported a number of problems with this tool. While acknowledging the enormous benefits of IWB, especially with regard to the ease of accessing online materials, she stated that continuous power cuts, the inadequate internet services, and the resistance of older teachers to the new technology are all factors that contribute to the inadequate use of the innovative tool, or the total lack of use.

Teachers in private schools, on the other hand, thought that the textbooks imported from the United States do not take the local students' needs and backgrounds into account, and felt that the teachers are mostly unprepared to use them. Teachers referred to these textbooks by the publishers' names and they included Scott Foresman, Prentice-Hall, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and Macmillan/McGraw-Hill. The Scott Foresman *Reading Street* and Prentice-Hall *Literature: Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes* textbook series were widely used by the schools. Researching these textbooks reveals that they were designed after the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in the US, which tied federal funding to student performance on achievement assessments, and the textbooks attempt to align K-12 content with state achievement tests. Furthermore, these textbooks claim to provide school teachers across the United States "with high-quality, well aligned classroom assessments to reliably monitor student progress in developing priority skills and achieving state reading educational objectives" (Gatti, 2005, p. 4). In short, educational objectives in these textbooks were designed for an American, not a Lebanese, audience. They were created to meet US state assessments, not Lebanese official exit tests; and they included classroom assessment materials for US, not Lebanese, teachers.

All the private school teachers interviewed in this study concurred that these textbooks were mainly about US culture and had nothing to do with Lebanese students. One teacher said, "We've always had problems with a couple of lessons which are not related to the Arab culture by any means. Such problems made it difficult for us [teachers] to get students to connect the themes with their own experiences." Examples include lessons on "garage sales," "piñatas," "Western life," and "American folk traditions. Another example is related to a lesson on US currency. "The majority of students in grade three," one teacher stated, "have never seen a dollar bill let alone quarters, dimes, and cents. They do not even know the difference among different Lebanese bills. How do we expect them to learn about something they have never seen or used?" In addition to dealing with cultural issues, developing students' writing skills was another problem identified by the private school teachers. The textbooks, one teacher explained, expect a six-year-old child to write a paragraph immediately using "vivid words and strong verbs and adjectives before the student is exposed to grammar rules." "The students," the teacher stated,

“need the mechanics, the strategy, and then they will learn to have the skills later on through practice.” The textbooks, it seems, do not focus on grammar and do not have enough grammar exercises, which is an issue that public school teachers complained about as well. This challenge, another teacher clarified, “would be fine if the students were upper level. But it is not adequate for students in lower grades.” Finally, one teacher reported that “about 70 to 80% of the classroom time is spent on reading comprehension because texts are long and have a lot of difficult vocabulary, most of which have not been encountered by teachers before.” Such a practice reduces the amount of time spent on writing strategies and the writing process.

Teacher preparation and qualifications. In the academic year 2009 – 2010, there were a total of 82,842 teachers in Lebanon. They were divided as follows: 57% private school teachers and 43% public school teachers. Of the total number of teachers, 25% (9% of public school teachers and 16% of private school teachers) taught with a high school certificate only (CERD, 2011). While 25% might not seem that big of a percentage to some, especially when considering that 42% of the teachers had a Bachelor’s degree, this percentage raises some questions about the ability and qualifications of these teachers to teach effectively. Of course, the lack of a degree does not negate the possibility that these teachers might have participated in workshops and professional preparation programs, and that their experience might have been wide enough to compensate for a degree. A degree in and of itself is not a guarantee that the teacher is effective.

Schools have different criteria for hiring teachers. Some schools hire teachers based on qualifications, i.e., whether a teacher has a degree in a core area (Bachelors degree or teaching diploma); other schools are satisfied with a high school certificate. Teachers reported that some schools hire teachers who have not finished their degree yet and appoint them to teach lower grades. Usually, teachers who do not have a degree will get paid less than those who have a degree, and that could be an incentive for schools that want to increase their profits. With the exception of the three private schools that supported their teachers’ professional development, the rest of the schools seemed to be indifferent to the importance of this issue.

Three of the teachers reported that they think they are losing their skills in English. One teacher stated that she gets embarrassed when students ask her about aspects related to US culture with which she is unfamiliar. This particular person did not feel that she was developing as a teacher. On the contrary, she believed that when she started teaching eight years ago, her skills were better. “My spoken English,” she stated, “is now restricted to the things I teach in grades one through five.” During her eight years at the same private school, this teacher attended two workshops that she had to pay for out of her own pocket, even though her salary is only \$400 a month. Another teacher stated that her school organized regular workshops for the teachers, and then, as part of the school’s “educational reading” policy, they asked the teachers to write a research paper. The teacher maintained that this requirement “took a lot of our time...the very little we had left.”

In contrast, a teacher in a public school reported that during her ten years of teaching at the same school, she attended only one workshop, which was organized by the American Embassy. The lack of support in public schools is not only restricted to workshops, but also to aspects related to students’ daily challenges. A teacher expressed frustration because of her inability to deal with a

case of a dyslexic child because the school did nothing to support her in helping him. Another teacher was confused about the correct course of action to take in regard to students who are disruptive and have parents who do not care. She said, “I don’t know if I should be mad at them [the students], or if I should sympathize because they are underprivileged.”

A related issue is that of quality control. Education inspectors rarely monitor public school teachers, in contrast to private school teachers where “there is always somebody who is supervising,” as one teacher indicated, and where, in some cases, coordinators visit classes every other week. This lack of control in public schools does not create “the necessary pressure,” a teacher stated, in order to force instructors to do a good job. “The teacher in public schools,” one teacher explained, “is left to his own conscience to teach. Conscience is the inspector. If they have strong moral and ethical conscience, they will do a good job. If not, then they won’t.”

Overall, with the exception of one teacher who was working on her MA in English language teaching, none of the teachers interviewed had any form of special preparation to teach their core areas. While the teachers acknowledged the importance of professional development courses and/or workshops and expressed interest in participating in them, all of the teachers were hesitant to participate without their school’s support. They felt that they are overworked and underpaid, so taking on additional professional development responsibilities would be out of the question unless their working conditions improve.

Parents’ role. All the teachers interviewed addressed the role of parents in their children’s academic development in general and in their acquisition of foreign languages in particular. While some public school teachers complained about the parents’ seemingly indifferent attitudes towards their own children, all the private school teachers complained about the parents’ pervasive interference with their teaching practices. One public school teacher explained that many children in her school come from disadvantaged backgrounds: Their parents might be illiterate and extremely poor, they might not have the time and energy to help their children with homework, or they might not care enough to come to school and check on their children’s progress. This particular teacher was working in one of the poorest areas in Northern Lebanon. Another teacher stated that parents do not use the target language with their children at home, which is important if they want their children to learn the language. Some parents, this public school teacher explained, do not consider a foreign language to be an important subject area because they care more about science and math, and think these subjects are more useful to their children’s future careers.

In contrast, private school teachers claimed that parents often come to school and question the teaching and grading practices of teachers. A parent, for example, may believe that his or her child deserves a higher grade for no better reason than the fact that s/he has a tutor, is smart, and so on. Other parents, especially mothers, are teachers themselves and they openly question their children’s teachers because the mothers think they teach in a better way – a situation that might be intimidating to novice teachers. Some parents question the use of games in teaching, thinking that games are a waste of time. Another example of the extent of parents’ interference is one given by a teacher who once asked a fourth grader to pick up the empty bottle he threw away in class. The child blatantly refused, and the next day his mother complained to the school’s

principal, claiming that the teacher is asking her child to pick up trash instead of teaching him French.

Exam preparation. The public school teachers complained that their students are not prepared enough for the official examinations. In the language sessions, for example, “more than half of class time is conducted in the native language,” one teacher explained. As a result, students are not able to express themselves in the foreign language during exams. In addition, when it comes to the scientific subjects, public school students are highly disadvantaged. When the students are not proficient enough in the foreign language, then they end up not doing well in these subjects in their schools’ in-house examinations and the official exit examinations. One teacher believed that such a predicament is the responsibility of the foreign language teacher as well as the “incompetent [math or science] teacher who thinks that the students should rise up to the level of the teacher, not the other way around.”

Another aspect of the issue related to teaching subject matter in the target language is explained by the fact that some teachers do not use the native language when they are explaining content. Oftentimes, the students do not understand the meaning of concepts, and as a result, they may not understand an entire lesson. Other teachers resort to explaining concepts in the native language, which enables students to pass the examinations in their schools, but not the official examinations. Of course, lack of proficiency in foreign languages is not the only reason why these learners end up failing in math and science. Other reasons identified by teachers include incompetent teachers who do not teach scientific methods and reasoning, outdated teaching styles, lack of materials and labs, and lack of government support. Other reasons have been highlighted by the Lebanese National Educational Strategy (2010) and they include “low qualifications of the teaching and administrative staff in schools,” “absence of a suitable learning and teaching environment,” and the “lack of laws and regulations which are necessary for increasing the possibility of improvement” (p. 3).

In the private schools, however, “students are overly prepared in all subjects, and there is a teaching to the test culture that can go overboard,” as one teacher indicated. In one school, the history textbook for example is the same one used for grades eight and nine. “They practically teach the same lessons so that by the end of grade nine, students can sit for the official examinations and guarantee a high pass,” the teacher stated. Another teacher revealed that some schools get so competitive that they refuse to register weaker students. “They only admit the best of the best, and might grant weak students conditional acceptance provided that they score high in the mock official examinations,” the teacher asserted. If such students do not score high in these exams, the school will not endorse their official exam applications. “The students won’t represent the school. This is done for marketing purposes so that schools secure and maintain a reputation of 100% success rate in the official exams,” the teacher explained.

Communication in foreign languages. Inadequate student preparation for communication in foreign languages was a major theme that emerged while talking with the public school teachers. The teachers stated that both the schools’ in-house examinations and the official exit examinations do not test students’ speaking skills, and as a result, neither the teachers nor the students focus on this skill. Parents also do not seem to be doing anything at home to help their children learn the language. Speaking the target language, teachers believed,

is not as important as being able to write grammatical sentences and paragraphs. Because speaking is not graded, a teacher explained, it is not as important to either teachers or students. “Students are weak in all the skills, but especially in writing,” said one teacher. “Students think in Arabic and translate what they want to say into English even when they speak. Their spoken skill is weak, but we test them in writing – not speaking. There are speaking activities, but because they are not tested in speaking, they do not put much effort into it.” The problem of translating from Arabic to English was also noted by Bahous, et al. (2011).

Another teacher explained that an instructor who has forty students in a classroom does not have time to encourage each student to use English in class. “I yell at my students in Arabic, and they barely listen to me. If I do it in English they will not listen at all.” In addition, “when a student comes to you [the teacher] with a problem, like his friend stole his pencil, and they try to explain it to you in English, it gets painful to listen to. They struggle so much while they are looking for the word. I get impatient and I just ask them to say it in Arabic and be done with it.”

Of the public school teachers, only one teacher reported going out of her way to help her students develop oral fluency in the target language outside the classroom. She said that she encourages her students to chat with her using Yahoo Messenger about any topic they want on one condition—that they “use proper English and no internet language.” She said that some of her good students chat with her in English on a weekly basis even though these students do not have Internet access or even computers at home. They use Internet cafés on the weekends.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research

This study was exploratory in nature, and it highlighted a number of challenges that some school teachers in Lebanon are currently facing. Based on these teachers’ beliefs and their own descriptions of their conditions, it seems that more attention should be given to teacher qualifications and professional preparation in both the public and private sector. An important finding in this study was related to teachers’ working conditions, and how most teachers are overworked, have no support, and are underpaid. Such conditions impact their motivation to teach and their willingness to contribute beyond the materials they are provided with, which has a negative impact on students as well. Lack of government inspection and support in public schools adds to the teachers’ lack of motivation for self-development.

As far as teacher qualification is concerned, there has to be some kind of benchmark or measure (e.g., a degree, records of effective teaching, participation in workshops and conferences, etc.) that shows that the teacher is qualified for teaching. The issue of qualifications is of primary concern now that the new curriculum emphasizes learning-centered classrooms that are based on the latest teaching methods. Even teachers who have been tenured for a long time and who have degrees would have to participate in workshops to become up-to-date. (It is worth mentioning that since 2000, the government has no longer been hiring teachers without a Bachelors degree, as one instructor explained.) Reflective learning must become an integral component in teacher preparation programs and ELT education, where teachers not only connect theory and practice, but also develop meta-cognitive skills (Orr, 2011).

Another important finding in this study was related to a general dissatisfaction with textbooks among the teachers. Public school teachers identified a number of shortcomings in the locally published government textbooks, such as language mistakes and lack of adequate grammar exercises. Private school teachers, on the other hand, felt that foreign language textbooks are indeed foreign to the local culture, do not prepare students for official exit examinations, and do not encourage students to use the target language for communicative purposes. A textbook analysis was beyond the scope of the current study, and therefore, it is recommended that future studies examine textbooks for a more reliable and valid description of the efficacy of the locally published textbooks.

In addition, the lack of professional development might explain why teachers expressed dissatisfaction with regard to the textbooks, especially in relation to exposing students to other cultures, the few grammar drills or activities, and the teachers' belief that students must master the grammatical rules and "proper punctuation" before they can write. Workshops should raise teachers' awareness towards such issues, and towards their own role in encouraging students to *use* the foreign language. But before we hold workshops for teachers, government officials, school principals, and directors should realize the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment for their teachers. Instructors who are insecure about their positions, and who are constantly put down and feel that they are not developing are unlikely to give their full potential to the school and their students.

Parents, too, are part of the process, and they should participate in meetings or workshops that make them more appreciative of the teaching profession, and their own role in their children's academic development. More importantly, the government should also invest in public education in order to empower a large portion of the Lebanese community who might become marginalized and discriminated against in terms of job opportunities as a result of the blemish attached to public schools. Investing in the public sector does not mean making a deal to purchase electronic tablets (e.g., iPads) for students to use, as was suggested by the Lebanese Prime Minister in 2011. While introducing technology into the classroom is an important initiative, at present the government should invest in more urgent issues such as teacher preparation, labs (science, computer, and language), contextually appropriate materials and textbooks, and renovating public school buildings, to name a few. Future research could also investigate students' actual proficiency levels in the different languages spoken in Lebanon, rather than just teachers' perceptions of their students' proficiency levels or students' own self-assessment. Moreover, research could focus on triangulating data obtained from textbook analyses, education experts, teachers, and students in order to assess the degree to which the curriculum objectives are being met.

Conclusion

The Lebanese government should start working on developing the education system by taking a number of serious steps, including improving the working conditions of teachers, initiating teacher preparation workshops that empower instructors, and implementing informed quality control measures. The government should also involve teachers in decision making rather than enforcing top-down policies without looking at actual needs. Such actions, among others, will

ensure the integrity of the educational system in Lebanon and will have mutual benefits for all of the parties involved.

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